

Who Wears the Cape in This Relationship?: An Analysis of Gender in Superhero Films

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Tori Foster

Thesis Advisor

Melinda Messineo

Signed

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

May 2016

Date of Graduation

May 2016

Abstract

Although Marvel and DC have been making comics since the 1930s, the recent boom in superhero films' popularity has left Marvel and DC's logos and superheroes plastered on billboards, t-shirts, children's toys, collectibles, and in many more places. These heroes are pervasive in our culture – Superman's triangular logo would be recognized by almost anyone. However, these icons are studied relatively little, and their effect on our culture can be massive. The analysis of fourteen superhero films from Marvel and DC over the past twelve years shows that superhero films portray both hypermasculine and hypersexualized characters, and that there's a gendered difference in the ways superheroes and superheroines are portrayed, as well as a significant difference between the portrayals of superheroines and female non-superhero characters. I analyze these fourteen films and their portrayals of gender, looking at BSRI traits, characters' roles in their films' plots, the characters' superpowers, and instances of sexualization of the characters.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Melinda Messineo for advising me through this project. She helped me enormously throughout my senior year, both on this project and in my other classes, and I'm grateful for all she did to help me make this project into something I am passionate about and enjoy. I would also like to thank my friends, especially Joanna, for their support as I worked on my thesis this semester.

Introduction

The first superhero film I saw was *Spider-Man* (2002), followed by the rest of the trilogy, but the first superhero film that really stood out to me was *Iron Man* (2008). That must have been the real beginning, because Marvel superhero films had me hooked from then on, particularly with an immense love of *Thor* (2011). Finally, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) was my kryptonite, and sucked me hook, line, and sinker into the superhero franchise. I had watched Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy – *everyone* was talking about *The Dark Knight* after it came out in 2008, it was almost necessary to watch it in order to hold any conversation with anyone, or at least it seemed that way. But it was Marvel that I loved most, a fact perhaps aided by the sheer volume of material they produced compared to DC.

Marvel and DC are the two biggest superhero comics producers in the United States, each with their own massive and varying cast of characters. Many of these characters are hugely famous, from DC's Batman and Superman to Marvel's X-Men, Iron Man, and Spider-Man. Marvel and DC have both been making comics (although the company names were different) since 1939 and 1934, respectively. Films based off of these characters have been made since the 1940s, but in the 2000s, Marvel and DC superhero films both experienced a resurgence in popularity – possibly stemming from the advancement in special effects and CGI technology. Fans perceive a difference between these two franchises in both style and writing, and the two fanbases are often somewhat polarized against each other. Although of course there are plenty of people who consider themselves fans of both, individuals who consider themselves fans of only one or the other are staunch in their beliefs that the franchises are significantly different from one another. DC films in particular are thought of as "darker" than

Marvel films, with more political undertones and heroes who are “ruthless in [their] quest for justice” (Lew). There is also a perception that Marvel films are “the more woman-friendly option” compared to DC, with more well-written female characters and fleshed out relationships, but whether this is true has not been examined (Baker-Whitelaw, 2014). This difference in fan perceptions sparked my interest in my examining the difference between the two companies, hoping to compare the two franchises in their portrayals of women.

Rather than just hearing about new superhero films from previews and lists of showings at movie theaters, I began to keep up with future Marvel plans, and remember dates for releases of new films. I even read a few comics series. There were discussions with friends (or simply posts on platforms such as Tumblr) and in-depth analysis of movies and arguments about whether one writer’s characterization of a character was better or worse than another writer’s, complaints about Scarlett Johansson’s varying wigs in every movie she appeared in, and sometimes complete transformations of stories and characters in conversations. Somehow, many characters reached more depth and complexity in a fan-based collective imagination than they ever will on-screen. Fanfiction has been popular since *Star Trek* was originally aired in 1966, and has gotten more popular and easy to share with the Internet. Fanfiction is a huge aspect of this fan-based imagination and of the ways that consumers of media manipulate and interpret content (Kellner, 2011). Fans change characters and plots in creating their own content – often creating spaces where marginalized groups rewrite content for themselves. Often it was jarring to realize that I loved the idea of a character, which my friends and I had hijacked and transformed, more than the character’s depiction in the film. I found that this was especially true for female characters in these films – and that it often felt *necessary*. Female

characters often had so little characterization that they were less likely to be someone's "favorite," or sometimes entire parts of her character would be created by fans, simply because there were large blanks to fill. This aspect of superhero media is also beyond the scope of this study, but those realizations, timed with my experiences in college, both with peers and in my classes about gender and/or media, made me want to look both more critically and more in-depth at the movie genre I loved.

A complicating factor associated with the analysis of superhero media is the complexity of the various forms of media they occupy. All Marvel and DC superhero films are based off of original Marvel or DC characters, however what that means both in terms of characterization and in plot varies widely. Superhero comic books in the United States operate in "runs," where authors and illustrators (and others, such as editors, inkers, etc) work together on a comic book for a limited amount of time, like the length of one season of a television show – except after one "season," it's likely the entire team behind the series will change, and most of the time there will be no continuity between the plots of the seasons. When comic book characters are adapted to screen, this gives the writers a lot of options – and even the option to write their own timeline with the characters, and to vary the characterization from a character, so long as he's still recognizable as Batman (which is usually not difficult to do, what with the nature of superhero costumes). This could give comic books and their movie adaptations the opportunity for immense amounts of diversity in their plots and characterizations, but investigation into whether or not that is actually manifested in superhero films is beyond the scope of this study.

The superhero film genre has been booming since the early 2000s, and its popularity is only growing, as evidenced by the number of blockbusters both Marvel and DC have produced

since 2000 alone – just last year, Joss Whedon’s *Avengers: Age of Ultron* earned over 191 million U.S. dollars in its opening weekend at box offices (“Comic Book Adaptations”). In 2012, Christopher Nolan’s final installment in his Batman trilogy, *The Dark Knight Rises*, earned over 160 million dollars on its opening weekend (“All Time Worldwide Box Office Grosses”). As of this writing, Joss Whedon’s *The Avengers* is ranked the fifth highest grossing movie worldwide, according to Box Office Mojo, with over 1.5 billion dollars in ticket and DVD sales, not including the vast amount of merchandise that accompanies these franchises. Clearly, these films reach wide audiences and the viewers are not just young males. Since 2010, women have consistently made up a slightly larger share of movie-going audiences, though just 52% over men’s 48% (MPAA, 2014). In 2014, *Guardians of the Galaxy*’s (the year’s top-grossing film) audience was 59% male, and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*’s audience was 58% male. Similarly, in 2015, the audience of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* was 58% male (MPAA, 2015). However, women continue to make up 41-42% of these films’ audiences – and perhaps some women avoid these films because of the lack of relatable, developed female characters within them. Fifty-seven percent of the audience of *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1* (2014) was female – an action movie of a similar caliber as *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, but with a female lead, and indeed many other developed female characters (MPAA, 2014).

As the viewership by women has been growing, the representation of women (or lack of it) in these films has not gone entirely unnoticed, but it has, by and large, gone without acknowledgement or change from the film companies and franchises. Fans have demanded films for both Black Widow, Captain Marvel, and Wonder Woman. Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman both have upcoming solo movies, but despite Black Widow’s popularity from *Iron Man*

2, *The Avengers*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, she has yet to receive a main title from Marvel, or any announced plans for a film of her own. In 2014, twelve percent of the top 100 grossing films featured female protagonists, 30% of all speaking characters, and 29% of all major characters. This is an increase of only 2% since 2002 (Lauzen, 2015). When women *are* present in media, they tend to be heavily gender-typed and relatively less diverse than male roles. Female characters were more likely than males to be identified by “personal life-related roles,” while male characters were more likely to be identified by work-related roles (Lauzen, 2015). Thirteen percent of characters were classified as leaders by Lauzen’s study, and only 5% of female characters qualified as leaders, while 16% of male characters did. Women’s representation is lacking in both numbers and in quality, and this study aims to observe both in comic book based superhero films across the Marvel and DC franchises.

Literature Review

Cultural Studies and the BSRI

Cultural studies acknowledges the importance of media culture in “provid[ing] the materials for constructing views of the world, behavior, and even identities” (Kellner, 2011, p. 8). It emphasizes the study of popular media and the importance of critically analyzing and interpreting it, in order to understand how ideologies are reproduced in media and how they are normalized within it through “encoding” relations of power and domination in cultural texts. Cultural studies emphasizes the importance of media’s influence and the need for a multidimensional approach to analyzing media and, especially, criticizing harmful messages that

include racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other bias against groups. The effects of media on its audiences have been long-studied, with theories such as cultivation theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory. Cultivation theory argues that more exposure to television makes people more likely to view social reality to be the same as the version of reality seen on television (Baker & Raney, 2007). Social learning theory adds to this and shows that children model roles and behaviors they see in media (Baker & Raney, 2007). Social cognitive theory argues that knowledge and development (i.e. of gender) can stem from observing others in both social interactions and through media influences. The ideologies presented in media can have a direct impact on both children and adults' perceptions of social reality, which in turn causes those individuals to perpetuate those ideologies in their own lives and interactions.

These ideologies are connected to all aspects of the social environment, including the way in which gender is experienced and performed. Gender role expressions have been classified as points on a continuum and are often measured on scales to demonstrate the degree of conformity to gender role expectations. The Bem Sex Role Inventory is one of the most used of such scales. In 1974 Sandra Bem created the BSRI to measure masculinity and femininity on two separate scales – a new concept where gender had in the past been considered two bipolar ends of a spectrum. The BSRI also measured androgyny, suggesting that individuals might be *both* masculine and feminine, rather than simply one or the other. Bem argued that “strongly sex-typed individuals” would be limited in the range of traits and behaviors open to them, and hoped to question the assumption that sex-typed individuals “typifie[d] mental health” and proposed that “more flexible sex-role self-concepts” were healthier. The BSRI is a 60-item questionnaire, with 20 items classified as masculine, 20

feminine items, and 20 “neutral” items, which were originally used to ensure that the BSRI did not measure social desirability, but “now serves primarily to provide a neutral context for the Masculine and Feminine scales” (Bem, 1974, p. 156).

Many researchers have evaluated the validity of the BSRI, with varying results. In 1998 Holt & Ellis found that all of the masculine traits on the BSRI were valid measurements of masculinity, and that all but two of the feminine traits were still valid – the traits “loyal” and “childlike” has significance levels in marginal regions and were “in the expected direction.” They noted, however, that the magnitude of difference in desirability has decreased since Bem’s 1974 study. They also noted that the difference has decreased more for masculine traits than for feminine traits, meaning masculine traits are more likely to be seen as desirable for women as well as men – though the masculine traits were still rated as significantly more desirable for a man than for a woman. The difference decreased for feminine traits as well, but by smaller margins than the masculine traits. On the other hand, Auster & Ohm found in 2000 that 18 of 20 feminine traits still qualified as feminine, but that only 8 of 20 masculine traits still qualified as masculine. Gender appears to have diversified with regard to masculine traits, but the same appears less true for feminine traits. Although the studies differ in their results on the validity of the BSRI traits, both indicate that perceived desirability of masculine traits for women has been increasing, and both findings of change in the validity of the scale demonstrate the socially constructed nature of gender roles and their ability to change.

Changes in Gender and Superheroes

Many studies have examined gender in media, and several have looked specifically at gender in superhero films, television shows, and comic books. One researcher examined the idea of the “supermom” and its link with both superheroines, feminism, and motherhood through three comic book superheroines – Sue Storm/Invisible Girl, Marvel Girl/Jean Grey, and Ororo Munroe/Storm (D’Amore, 2012). She noted the various ways these superheroines displayed maternal characteristics, suggesting that “the superheroine’s performance of maternity empowers the maternal, accepting motherhood [...] as an asset, rather than a liability” (p. 1226). The author notes that the supermom stems from the fact that “many women found it easier to carry the burden of responsibility for both spheres rather than inflame the conflict that arises when men’s roles need to change” (p. 1235). Sue Storm, the only actual mother in comic books between 1960 and 1980, struggled as a working mother, and “when work and family came head to head, Sue was instantly devalued as a worker in favor of her maternal obligations” despite her capability – she was able to project a force field to protect both herself and others, as well as to become invisible. Sue refuses to compromise her femininity for her job, or vice versa (p.1235). She’s an equal on her team but is not particularly masculine – the nature of her powers makes her both more easily underestimated (even by her teammates) and more powerful than her coworkers.

Marvel Girl is a young member of the X-Men, the only woman on the team, and despite her age she takes a very maternal position, scolding them on their table manners, urging them to be careful in fights, and using their full names as commands and exclamations (“Bobby Drake! You know how Professor X feels about table manners!”) (D’Amore, 2012, p. 1238).

However, her maternal nature becomes a strength, when she gains the ability to telepathically locate other mutants – her “family.” And with the introduction of a new team of X-Men, Storm joined the team, also as the only woman on the team. She was able to control weather, making her a literal symbol of Mother Nature. Storm was the most powerful member of the X-Men when she was “loose and free,” and her powers and position as a Mother Nature figure give her (and gives maternity itself) immense power.

While comics might have had a feminine-positive message in the 1960s-80s, that trend appears to have changed drastically or has not transferred into films and television programs. Baker & Raney studied children’s animated superhero cartoons and noted a trend of female superheroines’ portrayals as being more masculine in nature, but that male superheroes were not typically more feminine, but hypermasculine (2007). However, they found that when superheroines would “break the stereotypical mold in one aspect of their character,” they often were stereotypical in other ways. Most notably, females were portrayed significantly as more emotional and more attractive than male character, as well as significantly more worried about their appearance, more likely to get “overexcited” in a crisis, and more likely to ask questions. Male characters were more likely to be seen as threatening and to show anger, and males and females were “virtually equal” in terms of their aggressiveness. The authors argue that this suggests that “to be heroic, one has to be more masculine, regardless of gender” (p. 37). Female superheroes are portrayed in feminine ways, in some aspects, but their strengths do not stem from their feminine qualities, but rather are often rooted in more masculine traits. This is consistent with past research indicating a recent trend toward an emphasis on hypermasculinity and hypersexuality in media (Katz, 2011).

Joseph Walderzak examined the way the archetype of the damsel in the superhero film has evolved from 1978-2014, and argued that “the often-sexist fetishization of the superheroine is treated as emancipatory at the same time as it justifies the problematic weaknesses inherent to the characters” (2016, p. 73). He suggests that damsel roles in superhero films, while once helpless and acting as a “romantic vessel,” have evolved into a role with “meaningful agency [...] nearly as likely to rescue the hero as he is her” (p. 45-46). Walderzak makes the point that masculinity is not equivalent to empowerment, although the superhero film would have its viewer believe so. He argues that the revision of the damsel trope has allowed it to “repurpose traditional femininity into a heroic context,” and give the characters power in femininity (p. 73).

Media Effects and Gender

These portrayals of gender have effects on the way gender is perceived in our society, as mentioned before with regard to cultivation theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory, and can have various effects on behavior, perceptions, and beliefs. For example, Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson, and Collier (2014) found a correlation between preschool children’s viewing of superhero television programs and gender-stereotyped play, particularly male-stereotyped play and weapon play. They suggested that play gives children a chance to “practice” gendered behavior they learn in media, and that they are likely to learn from “salient, powerful, same-gender models.” While both boys and girls who viewed superhero programs were more likely to play with toy weapons, only boys who watched superhero programs exhibited more gender-stereotyped play, not girls – they suggested that play for girls

might be more influenced by peer norms, and that girls might experience more messages in other media about feminine behavior to counteract the more masculine behavior in superhero programs.

In addition, Pennell & Behm-Morawitz (2015) found that viewing sexualized-victim female characters in superhero films resulted in less egalitarian beliefs about women's roles in society for female college students. Exposure to sexualized-heroine characters was not linked to gender role beliefs, but was associated with "increased importance of body competence to one's identity." The sexualized-heroines did not increase self-objectification, but the results marginally suggested that they may lower women's body esteem, while the sexualized-victim had no effect.

Sexualization of Superheroines and Fan Response

In addition to gaining power through their maternal representations, the sexuality of the superheroine is also a prominent element of her representation. The visual nature of the comic leads to the exaggeration and emphasis of the female form that's most similar to pinup iconography, but rather than being a source of power in any real sense, it is more an example of objectification and the pornographic object of gaze. This approach to representation of females has not gone unnoticed. *The Hawkeye Initiative* is a crowdsourced fan-art site on which fans and artists redraw the male superhero Hawkeye in the poses in which female superheroes are drawn in comic book panels. The website aims to "illustrate how deformed, hypersexualized, and impossibly contorted women are commonly illustrated in comics" ("About THI and FAQ"). Suzanne Scott argues that this "initiative" is designed to "provoke male readers of comics to

experience the realities of viewing comics as female readers" (2015, p. 152). Scott also notes the resemblance of many of these comic book superheroines' poses to that of pinup iconography, which she defines as "one body, depicted in its entirety and not engaged in a sexual act with another body, and a focus on the potential sexual energy of the pinup, through a 'direct eye-line connection to the implied viewer'" but contrasts this idea with that of male pinup imagery, which, rather than suggesting that they are only there to be looked at, the way female pinups are, they appear to be in the middle of an action or the potential for action is emphasized (p. 156). Scott emphasizes this depiction of power and agency and that the issue doesn't lie solely with the amount of skin superheroine costumes reveal or how skintight they are, "it is also about noting the subtle distinctions between how the equally muscular and kinetic bodies of male and female superheroes are posed and what their gaze implies" (p. 157). *The Hawkeye Initiative* subverts this power and gaze and brings light to the ways that women are posed in comics.

Overall, the literature describes a trend toward masculinity in both superhero films and in studies of the validity of the BSRI as a measurement of perceptions of masculinity and femininity, as well as a trend toward sexualization of female characters, and highlights some differences between damsel-archetype characters and superheroine characters. It also describes some effects of superhero media on audiences and the importance of ideologies recreated within media.

Research Question

This study qualitatively examines the difference in portrayals of male and female characters in superhero films between the two primary franchises, DC and Marvel, specifically looking at characters' roles in the plots and their resolutions, as well as examining the masculine and feminine traits and the ways in which they interact with other characters on screen. Based on the literature, I hypothesize that female superheroines in the sampled films will have more masculine traits and be more androgynous according to the BSRI, while male superheroes will continue to be masculine, with few feminine characteristics. Non-superheroine female characters will be more feminine than their superheroine counterparts, although most of the time they will be instrumental in the plot and act more as a partner to the superhero lead, however I hypothesize that male superheroes will have more influence on the plot than female superheroes. I also hypothesize that there will be a gendered difference in the kinds of superpowers that male and female superheroes will have, and that female superheroes and "damsels" will both be more sexualized than male characters. I expect to find that Marvel films have more developed and diverse female characters than DC films, based on the fan perception of the two franchises.

Method

The sample used comprises fourteen superhero films based on either Marvel or DC comics – seven from Marvel, and seven from DC, including one series from each. Marvel and DC were chosen based on the fact that they're the two largest producers of superhero comics in the United States, and the films based on their comics are often popular and well-known pieces

of popular culture. Originally, twenty-two films were selected for sampling, eleven each from both companies. This selection was based on a twenty-year time frame, and because DC had only eleven films based on its characters in those twenty years, eleven Marvel movies were chosen randomly from Marvel's twenty-year time frame. The sample included only theatrical releases and superhero films made about either Marvel or DC superheroes. However, due to time constraints, the number of sampled films was decreased to fourteen. One series from Marvel (the three *Iron Man* films) and one from DC (Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy) were chosen to include in the sample, with the thought that examining a series would yield insight into character development, particularly for oft-sidelined female characters. Marvel and DC each had one female-led film in the twenty-year sample frame (*Elektra* and *Catwoman*, respectively), and were included in the sample as they were considered important to analysis of female main characters and superheroines. The remaining films were chosen randomly. The films were obtained from libraries and the researcher's personal collection. The list of sampled films can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 Films Sampled

Marvel	DC
<i>Fantastic Four (2005)</i>	<i>Catwoman (2004)</i>
<i>Elektra (2005)</i>	<i>Batman Begins (2005)</i>
<i>Iron Man (2008)</i>	<i>Superman Returns (2006)</i>
<i>Iron Man 2 (2010)</i>	<i>The Dark Knight (2008)</i>
<i>Thor (2011)</i>	<i>Watchmen (2009)</i>
<i>Iron Man 3 (2013)</i>	<i>Green Lantern (2011)</i>
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)</i>	<i>The Dark Knight Rises (2012)</i>

Each film was viewed and analyzed with the results recorded on a code sheet (Appendix). For each film the number of male and female characters was recorded. Of those, one male and one female character was chosen by determining which characters were most central to the plot of the film. If, for example, two male characters were deemed equally important to the plot, a random number generator was used to determine which character would be the focus of the analysis.

Each character selected was then analyzed a number of ways. First, it was noted whether the character was a principal, supporting, or minor character. Each character's superpower was noted, with the idea of detecting any gendered patterns among them. Their roles in the escalations of the plots were noted, as were their roles in the plot resolutions. Critical scenes were noted for each character, defined as a scene most important for the individual character (such as in character growth), rather than for the plot, and any change the

character went through (positive or negative) was noted. Sexual subject and object codes (Table 2) as well as interaction style codes (Table 3) were used, both based on a set of codes used in another content analysis focused on advertisements (A sample code sheet is provided in the Appendix). Lastly, the Bem Sex-Role Indicator (BSRI) was used to record masculine, feminine, and neutral/"androgynous" personality traits for each character (Table 4).

Table 2 Sexual Subject/Object Codes

Code	Description
Sexual Gazer	The character doing the looking, "checking out" the other, gazing at, appreciating, or looking at the other. This is the sexual <i>subject</i> , not object.
Come-on	The character making sexual advances (verbal, non-verbal, physical, etc.); trying to "pick up" the other, the initiator, etc.
Self Gaze	Admiring oneself (in mirror, to camera, etc.). Both gazer and object.
Object of Gaze	The character looked at in a sexual way, the object of sexual gaze or attention, the one posing for the other, the sexual <i>object</i> .
Alluring Behavior	The character posing for the other, flirting, teasing. Sidelong, provocative glances, fleeting smiles, twinkling eyes, suggestive poses such as lying on the floor or bed, kneeling, bending, lightly brushing against, trying to get the other to make sexual advances.
Beauty Concerns	Character is concerned with enhancing or portraying beauty; trying to make oneself more attractive, concerned with looking younger, sexier, more desirable, etc.
Provocative Attire	This includes tight-fitting, low-cut, sexy attire, as well as various states of partial undress or nakedness, or the wearing of short-shorts, bathing suits, etc.

Table 3 Interaction Style Codes

Code	Description
Leader	Dominant, authoritative person in interaction; one who gives orders; one who is looked to for information or advice; one who instructs; one who passes judgment, gives punishment or conditional approval; directive, one with authority, boss, etc.
Follower	Submissive, one who takes orders, receives advice, asks questions, follows instructions, listens to authority, etc.
Respected	One with high status, honor, admiration; one to whom special privileges are granted; one who gets special treatment, elevated position; one to whom deference is owed by virtue of who they are or the position they hold.
Deferential	One who shows deference (bows, gives special treatment, averts eyes, uses formal greeting, etc.); one who is devoted to or serves one in power; one who waits on and for others, gets interrupted, is overlooked, etc. in an interaction.
Independent	Autonomous, self-directed, secure, able to stand alone, self-contained, separate, decisive, self-confident, assertive, takes a stand, initiator, acts without reference to others' evaluation of behavior.
Dependent	Depends on others; needs support, confirmation, and encouragement; other-directed; acts for others; insecure, wimpy, gives up easily, needs approval, indecisive.
Aggressive	Forceful, competitive, boastful, takes risks, oblivious, antagonistic, easily angered, quick to retaliate, swaggering, rough, gross, possessive, bold, concerned with losing face, etc. (macho or hypermasculine)
Passive	Gentle, kind, loving, compassionate, merciful, sensitive, non-aggressive, avoids confrontation, peaceful, negotiator, etc.
Instrumental	Calculating, cold, unemotional, self-serving, selfish, rational, feelings never hurt, doesn't cry; concerned with goals, actions, bottom line, success, etc.
Emotional	Concerned with others' feelings, supportive of others, not rational, sensitive, cries easily, talks about feelings, uses intimate talk, unconditional loving, tender touches.

Table 4 BSRI Character Traits

Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous
Self-reliant	Yielding	Helpful
Defends own beliefs	Cheerful	Moody
Independent	Shy	Conscientious
Athletic	Affectionate	Theatrical
Assertive	Flatterable	Happy
Strong personality	Loyal	Unpredictable
Forceful	Feminine	Reliable
Analytical	Sympathetic	Jealous
Leadership ability	Sensitive to others' needs	Truthful
Willing to take risks	Understanding	Secretive
Makes decisions easily	Compassionate	Sincere
Self-sufficient	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Conceited
Dominant	Soft-spoken	Likable
Masculine	Warm	Solemn
Willing to take a stand	Tender	Friendly
Aggressive	Gullible	Inefficient
Acts as a leader	Childlike	Adaptable
Individualistic	Does not use harsh language	Unsystematic
Competitive	Loves children	Tactful
Ambitious	Gentle	Conventional

Results and Discussion

BSRI Analysis

In a simple tally of masculine and feminine BSRI traits for each character (one male and one female per film), the difference in gendered traits becomes apparent. Male characters are more severely skewed toward masculine traits – Thor (*Thor*) has the highest number of masculine traits at sixteen, and the average number of masculine traits per male character is 10. The average number of feminine traits per male character is 1. The highest number of feminine traits held by male characters was three – held by Captain America (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*), Iron Man (*Iron Man 3*), and Thor. For female characters, on the other hand,

the highest number of feminine traits was 6 (for Jane Foster, also from *Thor*), and the average number of feminine traits was 3. The highest number of masculine traits held by a female character was Catwoman (*Catwoman*) with 10, and the average was 5. The average number of androgynous traits – used as a control measurement – was 4 for male characters and 3 for female characters. This supports the hypothesis that male characters would be more hypermasculine, while female characters would be more androgynous, with more masculine traits.

Interestingly, female characters who acted in superhero roles had more masculine traits than non-hero female characters – 6 on average for superheroines and 3 on average for non-hero female characters. The average number of feminine traits for superheroines was 2, and for non-superheroines the average was 3. This supports the hypothesis that superheroine characters were more masculine than their non-superheroine counterparts, but contrary to the hypothesis, non-superheroines are not significantly more feminine than superheroines according to the BSRI. The film *Catwoman* is a fascinating example of this duality, however. The film begins with meek, clumsy Patience, who transforms into Catwoman – almost forming a split personality. Patience's transformation into Catwoman is portrayed as liberating, and Patience begins to do and say things she would previously never have done. Patience had zero masculine traits and eleven feminine traits according to the BSRI, while her alter-ego, Catwoman, had almost the exact opposite: ten masculine traits and one feminine trait (Although both Patience and Catwoman's BSRI were recorded, Catwoman was chosen as the female character, and Patience's BSRI is not used in data.). In order for Patience to become a superheroine – and to become "free" and empowered, she needed to manifest masculine

traits. However, on average female characters were less hypermasculine than Catwoman and much more androgynous, and non-heroine characters were much less hyperfeminine than Patience. In addition to Patience, five female characters were considered more feminine than masculine according to the BSRI – Invisible Girl (*Fantastic Four*), the *Iron Man* series' Pepper Potts, Carol Ferris (*Green Lantern*), Rachel Dawes (in *The Dark Knight*, but not in *Batman Begins*), and Silk Spectre (*Watchmen*).

Gendered Superpowers

The analysis supports the hypothesis that there is a gendered difference in the types of superpowers given to male and female characters. It was very common for female superheroines in the selection of films to have no actual superpowers, often they were simply very skilled at stealth and combat, without special powers to aid them. For example, Black Widow (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Iron Man 2*) has no superpowers, but is a skilled spy and powerful in hand-to-hand combat. She has some technology that also helps her, mainly gadgets that shock her opponents. Selina Kyle (*The Dark Knight Rises*) has an identical skill set, as does Elektra (*Elektra*) and Silk Spectre (*Watchmen*). Four of the seven women classified as superheroines have no superpowers at all and are portrayed as skilled spies and their stealth is emphasized. Invisible Girl (*The Fantastic Four*) and Catwoman (*Catwoman*) are the only two characters with permanent superpowers. Invisible Girl can turn invisible – another stealth skill – and Catwoman obtains catlike senses, reflexes, and strength, as well as stealth. In *Iron Man 3*, Pepper Potts temporarily obtains superpowers – she has regeneration powers, super-strength, and super-speed. However, Extremis is dangerous and can also cause Pepper to

turn into a human explosive, and off-screen at the end of the film the powers are removed. She holds these powers for only a very short amount of film time, just long enough to make a surprise return and defeat the villain. She also expresses distress at having these powers – exclaiming, after beating the villain, “Oh my god, that was really violent!” – and the powers are removed immediately.

Women are confined to the shadows and to being unseen, while their male counterparts receive a huge variety of powers. Thor (*Thor*), Superman (*Superman Returns*), and Dr. Manhattan (*Watchmen*) all have godlike powers – their powers vary but super-strength, super-speed, flight, and invulnerability are common, while Dr. Manhattan has other powers such as manipulation of matter and the ability to see the future – and Captain America (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*) is a “supersoldier,” given super-strength and speed as well as regenerative powers. Two male characters, Iron Man (the *Iron Man* series) and Batman (*The Dark Knight* series) have no superpowers of their own, but rely instead on their technology and learned fighting skills. While the female characters without superpowers all seem to follow the same mold of stealth, Batman and Iron Man have almost entirely opposite trajectories from each other. Batman is a stealthy character, skilled in hand-to-hand combat – similar to that of the female characters – while Iron Man is definitely not stealth-focused. Iron Man’s skills in physical fighting aren’t emphasized either – his power lies in his suit (with lots of firepower) and his intellect. Mr. Fantastic (*The Fantastic Four*) can turn his entire body elastic, and Green Lantern (*Green Lantern*) is given a ring that allows him to create objects from energy. The sheer amount of variety in superpowers given to men draws a sharp contrast to those given to women. It seems that even while women are expected to be more masculine in order to be

superheroes, their power can only be expressed in a certain, more feminine manner. Even Batman's form of stealth differs from that of his female counterparts. In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Selina Kyle and Batman both use their stealth, but Selina's is significantly more based on her sex appeal, and while she has use of some technology, hers is less advanced than Batman's – probably due to her comparative lack in funding, as Batman is one of the richest men in Gotham. It's also interesting to note that the two superpower-less male characters – Iron Man and Batman – are very clearly portrayed as being wealthy, and this is the source of their ability to create technology to aid them in their heroics. In the case of Black Widow and other non-superpowered heroines, money is not mentioned, and in the case of Selina Kyle, it is shown that Selina is actually lower-class, stealing valuables for money. There is no Iron Man or Batman equivalent for women in terms of money and power. Overall, women's powers are portrayed in very similar ways across the board, while men receive a larger variety of powers and stories.

Influence in Plot

Male characters are much more likely to be the main characters of a film than women – only two of the films sampled (*Catwoman* and *Elektra*) featured women as the main character. Even films such as *The Fantastic Four* and *Watchmen* which appear to be films with a group of main characters, tend to focus more on a male character as the primary lead – in *The Fantastic Four* Mr. Fantastic appears to be the main character. In *Watchmen*, Silk Spectre is a member of the group, but Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach are much more central characters to the plot – although Silk Spectre is a key factor in bringing Dr. Manhattan into the plot, she is used more as a tool than an agent in furthering the plot. Main characters will naturally have larger roles in

resolving the plots of their films, and all but two of the male characters were main characters. These characters all have prominent roles in the resolution of the plot, typically in the form of a large battle near the end of the film. This is true also of Elektra and Catwoman, main characters of their own movies. That difference in influence on plot seems to be less based upon gender than on whether the character is the main protagonist of the film, however there is certainly a point to be made about the fact that so few superhero films star female main characters.

Even Invisible Girl, a member of The Fantastic Four and assumedly a main character, has a smaller influence on the plot than Mr. Fantastic, the leader of the group. It is his idea to go to space, which is how the group each gets their superpowers. He is the one in charge during much of the movie, attempting to build a machine to remove their powers and allow them to return to normal lives, and is the main strategist and commander during the final battle against the villain, telling the others what to do. Invisible Girl, on the other hand, has no clear role in the beginning of the plot other than dating Victor von Doom, who would become the villain of the film, and to create tension between herself and Mr. Fantastic, because they had previously dated. In the final battle, Mr. Fantastic instructs her to use her force field to contain the Human Torch's heat to stop the villain, but the narrative of the film seems to focus primarily on Mr. Fantastic's goals and concerns.

There is actually little difference between superheroines and non-superhero female characters' influences in plot. Both Black Widow (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*) and Selina Kyle (*The Dark Knight Rises*) act as aids to the main character, both fighting villains in the final fight scenes in their films. Black Widow helps Captain America go on the run when he's put in danger, and Selina Kyle, after first betraying Batman to the villain, then saves Batman at the

end of the film and helps him save Gotham. However, other superheroines are significantly more sidelined, like Invisible Girl, or Silk Spectre (*Watchmen*), whose overall influence on the plot is due to Dr. Manhattan's affection for her rather than her own action.

Non-superheroine characters have different actions in their influence on the plot, due to their lack of physical fighting abilities, but most of them also act as aids to the main hero – in *Batman Begins* Rachel Dawes, childhood best friend of the main character, influences the plot in lecturing Batman on his revenge-focused view of “justice,” turning his attention instead to the corruption in Gotham and in working for justice outside of his own revenge. Later in the film, she's also instrumental in saving the city by delivering the antidote to the villain's poison to Commissioner Gordon, without which the entire city would have been poisoned. She is ultimately rescued by Batman from a dangerous situation, but only after having a prominent role in helping to save the city. Carol Ferris (*Green Lantern*), Lois Lane (*Superman Returns*), and Pepper Potts (the *Iron Man* series) all have similar influences on the heroes and the plots of their films, either providing emotional support for the hero or using their non-super abilities to aid the hero in fighting villains – they simply use different methods than superheroines. Jane Foster (*Thor*) has the least amount of influence on the plot – hers is only that Thor falls in love with her, which aids and parallels his character growth from a headstrong, rash warrior into a compassionate leader. These films do not support the hypothesis that superheroines and non-superheroines would have different amounts of influence on the plots of their films, they only seem to demonstrate that superheroines use more masculine methods of influencing the plot, while non-superheroine characters, with less typically “heroic” traits and powers, rely on other methods to aid the main character.

Additionally, in female-led films, male non-hero characters play similar roles as female non-heroes – Tom Lone (*Catwoman*) acts as a love interest, and has little influence in the plot, although he's a police officer actively investigating Catwoman's crimes, and unknowingly dating Catwoman herself. In *Elektra*, the male character most central to the plot was the main villain, Kirigi, whose influence on the plot is large by nature of being an antagonist. Kirigi is searching for "the treasure," which Elektra is trying to protect throughout the film. Ultimately they fight in a battle at the end of the film, and Kirigi is killed by Elektra. There are few female villains, particularly in male-led superhero films, but one of the villains in *The Dark Knight Rises* is a woman, Talia, who is revealed to be the ultimate mastermind behind the events of the film – the other villain, Bane, is revealed to be a symbol to disguise her identity. Her role in the plot is hidden throughout the film but ultimately she drives the plot as well. The hypothesis that male superheroes will have greater influence in the plot than female superheroes was supported, but the hypothesis that non-superheroine characters would have more influence in the plot than their superheroine counterparts was not supported. It seems that the greatest difference in male and female roles in plots is based upon the lack of female characters in principal roles, rather than a difference between supporting roles.

Sexualization of Female Characters

The hypothesis that male and female characters differ in their levels of sexualization was also supported. Both superheroine and non-superheroine characters were more sexualized than male characters. Non-superheroine female characters were less likely to wear provocative attire than superheroines – all superheroines were classified as wearing provocative attire,

while Pepper Potts (in *Iron Man* and *Iron Man 3*) and Rachel Dawes (in *The Dark Knight*) were the only non-heroines classified as wearing provocative attire. However, while male superheroes are often wearing similar skintight costumes as female superheroes, or were often shirtless, the attire of female characters and male characters is often differently framed. For example, in *The Fantastic Four*, the three male main characters don their skintight suits – one of them complains about how tight they are, but at that moment Invisible Girl enters in her own skintight suit (unzipped a significant three inches more than the others' suits), and immediately none of the men have any further issues with the costumes. The men's costumes and bodies are never framed in this way. Even when other male characters are shirtless, it's often while they are exercising, and the focus is usually more on their power than on sexualizing their bodies. An exception is one scene in *Thor*, when Thor is changing his clothing and a female character, Darcy, remarks "you know, for a crazy homeless person, he's pretty cut," as Jane Foster surreptitiously glances at him and shyly looks away. Even Dr. Manhattan's (*Watchmen*) almost complete nudity is not sexualized or even addressed – except to note that he *can* change his form at will, he simply doesn't, and wears nothing but what seems to be a very small pair of underwear. Overall, men are more likely to exhibit "come-on" behaviors and interactions as well as to be sexual gazers, while women are more likely to be the objects of a sexual gaze, to exhibit alluring behavior, and to wear provocative attire.

Marvel vs. DC

Fan perception of a difference between the two franchises, Marvel and DC, led to a hypothesis that Marvel films would have more egalitarian, developed, and diverse female characters than DC. However, there was no significant difference in the portrayals of women between the two franchises. Even the numbers of male and female characters in the films sampled were nearly identical – for Marvel, there were 25 named female characters and 63 named male characters. For DC, there were 23 named female characters and 65 named male characters. Each franchise had only one film with a female principal character. There was no significant difference in the BSRI analysis – male characters were equally masculine across franchises, and superheroine characters were equally masculine, with non-superheroines being more feminine for both franchises as well.

There was no significant difference in the types of superpowers given to women in each franchise – each only had one female character with any actual superpowers – Invisible Girl (*The Fantastic Four*) and Catwoman (*Catwoman*) – and both had superheroine characters whose skills centered on stealth. Male characters in each franchise had varieties of superpowers, with no significant difference between the franchises – both had alien or “godlike” superheroes, both had characters who were given unique superpowers (such as Green Lantern’s ring and Captain America’s super-soldier “serum”), and both had male characters who had no powers but who obtained their skills and power through their wealth, to make technology that becomes the center of their power (Iron Man and Batman are both “self-made” superheroes).

There was no difference in the characters' influence on the plot between franchises, with only one female main character in each franchise, and similar patterns of influence between supporting characters. Characters also had similar patterns of sexualization, with female superhero characters consistently dressed in provocative attire, while male superheroes' costumes might be similarly skin-hugging, but are framed less sexually. Non-superheroines were less likely to be dressed in provocative attire for both franchises as well.

Conclusion

Overall, analysis of the sampled films supports the hypothesis of the overall trend in superhero films toward hypermasculinity and hypersexuality. Both male and female superheroes were more highly masculine than non-superhero characters. Further analysis of gendered traits in a larger sample of superhero films would deeply expand on how masculine and feminine traits differ between male and female characters – as well as between superheroes/superheroines and non-hero characters. It's also important to note what kinds of masculine and feminine traits characters receive – the BSRI does not contain only positive or negative traits in its list, and a gender difference could very well exist on which kinds of masculine or feminine traits are given to characters, and this could be an important area for future research.

There was also a significant difference in the types of superpowers (or lack of them) given to male and female characters, with female characters overwhelmingly remaining in a spy or spy-like role, while male characters received a large variety of powers, only one of which focused on stealth. Female characters are left to do their work in the shadows, remaining

unseen – their power lies in defense and stealth, rather than a more masculine aggression and physical power. A larger study in this area, examining the kinds of powers given to a much larger sample of male and female characters, would be able to explore whether this trend is true for superhero films overall, rather than the fourteen sampled here.

There appears to be little difference in the kinds of influences on the plot between gender, aside from the fact that more male characters are main characters and have more influence in the plot. However, superheroines and non-heroine characters played similar roles as aids to the main characters, contrary to the hypothesis that their roles would be different. Their roles only differed in the ways in which they aided the main character, depending on their abilities, which were typically more masculine and physical for the superheroines, while the other female characters used other means to aid the hero, such as emotional and social skills or intellect. Further research in this area would examine the relationship between masculinity and femininity and characters' roles in plots, both in the nature of each character's traits as well as in their powers.

Female characters are also more sexualized than male characters, even despite the similar skintight suits typical of the superhero genre. Male and female superheroes might wear similarly tight clothing, but female superheroes' costumes often reveal more of their skin, and most importantly, female characters' bodies are framed and talked about within the film in entirely different ways from men's. Men's bodies are emphasized in terms of power and action, while women's bodies are emphasized in terms of looks and as objects of a sexual gaze. Further research would look more in-depth at this aspect of superhero films, focusing more specifically

on the framing of men's and women's bodies as well as how their bodies are discussed in the films.

Superhero films are a newer, massively popular genre today, and have been studied relatively little. The breadth of their audience – including both children and adults – means the messages these films are putting out into their audiences are pervasive and influential. The messages about masculinity and femininity within these films appear to be extreme, and lending themselves toward hypermasculinity for heroes. The implications of this emphasis on masculinity and the way heroism is more and more linked to masculinity is a crucial subject to understand for culture today. The superhero film may or may not be the new Western, but its messages about masculinity and femininity appear to be just as powerful and extreme. Cultural studies emphasizes the ability of media culture to influence the construction of behavior, identities, and views of the world through its encoding of ideologies and relations of power (Kellner, 2011). The studies of the effects of superhero media mentioned above emphasize this as well – male children who view superhero television programs were more likely to engage in male-stereotyped play and weapon play (Coyne et al., 2014). For female college students, viewing sexualized-victim female characters in superhero films led to less egalitarian beliefs about women's roles in society, and viewing sexualized-heroines may lower their body esteem (Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). Studies of the validity of the BSRI demonstrate an overall trend in our culture toward masculinity – for both men and women, masculine traits are seen as more desirable than in Bem's original 1974 study, but the same is not true for feminine traits (Holt & Ellis, 1998; Auster & Ohm, 2000).

Although this trend of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality is not exclusive to superhero films, the popularity of these films – and the pervasiveness of all the merchandise and media associated with them – make them an influential force in media culture and an important and compelling area of study. Future research should examine larger numbers of superhero films, and should address aspects of this study in more depth and detail, as well as looking at the wealth of superhero films *not* based on Marvel and DC comic books. Studying the themes and implications of these superhero films in our culture could help us understand how to make superhero films more egalitarian and less hypermasculine, how to include superheroine characters who are neither hypermasculine nor hypersexualized, and how to dismantle the narrative that heroism is always masculine in nature.

Bibliography

- Auster, C. J., & Ohm, S. C. (2000). Masculinity and Femininity in Contemporary American Society: A Reevaluation Using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. *Sex Roles*, 43(7), 499-528. doi:10.1023/A:1007119516728
- Baker, K., & Raney, A. A. (2007). Equally Super?: Gender-Role Stereotyping of Superheroes in Children's Animated Programs. *Mass Communication and Society*, 10(1), 25-41. doi:10.1080/15205430709337003
- Baker-Whitelaw, G. (2014, November 05). Keeping score in the DC vs. Marvel diversity arms race. Retrieved May 20, 2016, from <http://www.dailydot.com/geek/dc-vs-marvel-diversity/>
- Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 42(2), 155-162. doi:10.1037/h0036215
- Box Office Mojo: All Time Worldwide Box Office Grosses. (n.d.). Retrieved April 19, 2016, from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>
- Box Office Mojo: Comic Book Adaptation. (n.d.). Retrieved April 19, 2016, from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=comicbookadaptation.htm>
- Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, D. A., & Collier, K. M. (2014). It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a Gender Stereotype!: Longitudinal Associations Between Superhero Viewing and Gender Stereotyped Play. *Sex Roles*, 70(9), 416-430. doi:10.1007/s11199-014-0374-8
- D'amore, L. M. (2012). The Accidental Supermom: Superheroines and Maternal Performativity, 1963-1980. *J Pop Cult The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(6), 1226-1248. doi:10.1111/jpcu.12006
- Holt, C. L., & Ellis, J. B. (1998). Assessing the Current Validity of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. *Sex Roles*, 39(11), 929-941. doi:10.1023/A:1018836923919
- Katz, J. (2011). Advertising and the Construction of Violent White Masculinity: From BMWs to Bud Light. In G. Dines & J. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader* (3rd ed.).
- Kellner, D. (2011). Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture. In G. Dines & J. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader* (3rd ed.).
- Lauzen, M. M. (2015). *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: On-Screen Representations of Female*

Characters in the Top 100 Films of 2014 [PDF]. San Diego, CA: Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film.

Lew, T. (2016, April 27). Marvel vs. DC: Which is the Better Comic Book Universe? Retrieved May 02, 2016, from <http://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/marvel-vs-dc-what-makes-them-different-and-which-is-better.html/?a=viewall>

MPAA Theatrical Market Statistics 2014 [PDF]. (2015). Motion Picture Association of America.

MPAA Theatrical Market Statistics 2015 [PDF]. (2016). Motion Picture Association of America.

Pennell, H., & Behm-Morawitz, E. (2015). The Empowering (Super) Heroine? The Effects of Sexualized Female Characters in Superhero Films on Women. *Sex Roles*, 72(5-6), 211-220. doi:10.1007/s11199-015-0455-3

Scott, S. (2015). The Hawkeye Initiative: Pinning Down Transformative Feminisms in Comic-Book Culture through Superhero Crossplay Fan Art. *Cinema Journal*, 55(1), 150-160. doi:10.1353/cj.2015.0075

Smith, A. (n.d.). *Smith Codebook* [PDF].

The Hawkeye Initiative: About THI and FAQ. (n.d.). Retrieved April 19, 2016, from <http://thehawkeyeinitiative.com/faq>

Walderzak, J. (2016). Rebooting the Damsel: The Transformation of the Damsel Archetype in Spider-Man, Superman, and Batman Films from 1978-2014. *Studies in the Fantastic*, 3(1), 45-75. doi:10.1353/sif.2016.0005

Appendix

Code Instructions:

MOVIE TITLE (YEAR)

Number of Female/Male Characters: count named characters, tally on back of sheet, use IMDB for reference. [note any ambiguous characters]

Male/Female Character: name character

Type of Character: note whether the character is principal, supporting, or minor.

A *principal character* is one whom the plot centers around and whose presence is essential to the story.

A *supporting character* is one who has a significant relationship with and active impact on some aspect of the principal character's life. This relationship and active impact is important to the story and observed through the supporting character's actions and behaviors.

A *minor character* is one who has no active impact on the story.

(Definitions taken from Smith)

Superpower: list superpowers, if any. note any masculine/feminine aspects.

Role in escalation of plot: note whether character disrupts, aids, motivates, is central, or is neutral in the escalation of the plot. note "damsel in distress" tropes or other tropes seen.

Role in resolution of plot: note whether character disrupts, aids, motivates, is central, or is neutral in the resolution of the plot. note "damsel in distress" tropes or other tropes seen.

Critical scene for character: note most important scene for the individual character (not necessarily for the movie or its plot), list no more than three. note why it is important, any details that stood out, particularly about gender.

Note any change character goes through: note progression or degression of character, in any sense that stands out.

Sexual subject/object codes: If sexuality is evident, code:

Sexual gazer: The character doing the looking, "checking out" the other, gazing at, appreciating, or looking at the other. This is the sexual *subject*, not object.

Come-on: The character making sexual advances (verbal, non-verbal, physical, etc.); trying to "pick-up" the other, the initiator, etc.

Self Gaze: Admiring oneself (in mirror, to camera, etc). Both gazer and object.

Object of Gaze: The character looked at in a sexual way, the object of sexual gaze or attention, the one posing for the other, the sexual *object*.

Alluring Behavior: The character posing for the other, flirting, teasing. Sidelong, provocative glances, fleeting smiles, twinkling eyes, suggestive poses such as lying on floor or bed, kneeling, bending, lightly brushing against, trying to get the other to make sexual advances.

Beauty Concerns: Character is concerned with enhancing or portraying beauty; trying to make oneself more attractive, concerned with looking younger, sexier, more desirable, etc.

Provocative Attire: This include tight-fitting, low-cut, sexy attire, as well as various states of partial undress or nakedness, or the wearing of short-shorts, bathing suits, etc.

Interaction style codes: what "type" of person is this character? someone can be many traits at once. note any ambiguities as well.

Leader: Dominant, authoritative person in interaction; one who gives orders; one who is looked to for information or advice; one who instructs; one who passes judgement, gives punishment or conditional approval; directive, one with authority, boss, etc.

Follower: Submissive, one who takes orders, receives advice, asks questions, follows instructions, listens to authority, etc.

Respected: One with high status, honor, admiration; one to whom special privileges are granted; one who gets special treatment, elevated position; one to whom deference is owed by virtue of who they are or the position they hold.

Deferential: One who shows deference (bows, gives special treatment, averts eyes, uses formal greeting, etc.); one who is devoted to or serves one in power; one who waits on and for others, gets interrupted, is overlooked, etc. in an interaction.

Independent: Autonomous, self-directed, secure, able to stand alone, self-contained, separate, decisive, self-confident, assertive, takes a stand, initiator, acts without reference to others' evaluation of behavior.

Dependent: Depends on others; needs support, confirmation, and encouragement; other-directed; acts for others; insecure, wimpy, gives up easily; needs approval; indecisive.

Aggressive: Forceful, competitive, boastful, takes risks, oblivious, antagonistic, easily angered, quick to retaliate, swaggering, rough, gross, possessive, bold, concerned with losing face, etc. (macho or hypermasculine)

Passive: Gentle, kind, loving, compassionate, merciful, sensitive, non-aggressive, avoids confrontation, peaceful, negotiator, etc.

Instrumental: Calculating, cold, unemotional, self-serving, selfish, rational, feelings never hurt, doesn't cry; concerned with goals, actions, bottom line, success, etc.

Emotional: Concerned with others' feelings, supportive of others, not rational, sensitive, cries easily, talks about feelings, uses intimate talk, unconditional loving, tender touches.

Character traits: list BEM traits (noting masculinity, femininity, or androgyny of trait)

Masculine

self-reliant
 defends own beliefs
 independent
 athletic
 assertive
 strong personality
 forceful
 analytical
 leadership ability
 willing to take risks
 makes decisions easily
 self-sufficient
 dominant
 masculine
 willing to take a stand
 aggressive
 acts as a leader
 individualistic
 competitive
 ambitious

Androgynous

helpful
 moody
 conscientious
 theatrical
 happy
 unpredictable
 reliable
 jealous
 truthful
 secretive
 sincere
 conceited
 likable
 solemn
 friendly
 inefficient
 adaptable
 unsystematic
 tactful
 conventional

Feminine

yielding
 cheerful
 shy
 affectionate
 flatterable
 loyal
 feminine
 sympathetic
 sensitive to others' needs
 understanding
 compassionate
 eager to soothe hurt feelings
 soft-spoken
 warm
 tender
 gullible
 childlike
 does not use harsh language
 loves children
 gentle

MOVIE - Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)

Number of Female Characters: 6

Number of Male Characters: 14

Male Character: Steve Rogers (Captain America)

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: "Super soldier": super-strength, -speed, -healing, -reflexes, -endurance
these are pretty masculine.

Role in escalation of plot: he's main char, goes on run, main offense against SHIELD/HYDRA/Winter Soldier, is trusted by Fury, target of Hydra

Role in resolution: He takes out 2 of 3 helicopters, battling Winter Soldier/Bucky - main end conflict

Critical scene for character:

Insight scene w Fury: Truck scene? Speech at SHIELD? Flashback?
last battle with Bucky? Telling Fury SHIELD has to be destroyed?

Note any change character goes through: "I wanted to do what was right - not sure what that is anymore"
no longer following orders; went from questioning commitment to SHIELD, and following orders to just taking SHIELD down

Sexual subject/object codes: provocative attire? - tight-fitting clothes
object of gaze?

Interaction style codes: respected, leader, emotional, aggressive

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - defends own beliefs, independent, athletic, assertive, leader, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive,
F - loyal, sympathetic, compassionate
A - helpful, conscientious, reliable, truthful, sincere, likable, conventional

Female Character: Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow)

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: "Superspy"; ~~none~~ but her skill set includes stealth, infiltration, some form of martial arts? She's physically skilled but not nec. w "powers"

Role in escalation of plot:

without her, Steve wouldn't get far, honestly. She helps him on the run
Role in resolution: fights Pierce, dumps Hydra/Shield intel onto internet, -secondary end conflict

Critical scene for character:

Truck scene? Scene at Sam's house?

Note any change they go through: Trust - hiding her identity from everyone to exposing all her secrets

Sexual subject/object codes: provocative attire; object of gaze - butt shot

Interaction style codes: Instrumental, independent, follower (sort of),

emotional about Fury's death but appears relatively calm

Character traits (BEM): M - self-reliant, independent, athletic, assertive, analytical, makes decisions easily, self-sufficient, individualistic, ambitious
A - loyal? understanding
A - unreluctant, secretive, adaptable, tactful

MOVIE - Thor (2011)

Number of Female Characters: 4

Number of Male Characters: 10

Male Character: Thor

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: He's a god/extraterrestrial who can control storms/thunder/lightning and also has a magic hammer only he can carry. He's strong.

Role in escalation of plot: focuses around his banishment / aim to get home and falling in love with Jane

Role in resolution: Sacrifices himself to stop Loki + destroyer is given his powers, goes home, breaks bridge back to Jane in order to save Jotunheim.

Critical scene for character: Odin's banishment; when he can't pick up Mjolnir; rooftop scene; destroyer + sacrifice scene; breaking off frost to save Jotunheim

Note any change character goes through: from headstrong / war-happy into responsible leader, sacrifices for others

Sexual subject/object codes: object of gaze for 1 scene; come-on

Interaction style codes: leader, respected, aggressive, emotional(?)

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - defends own beliefs, independent, athletic, assertive, strong personality, forceful, leader, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, dominant, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, individualistic, competitive, F - loyal, understanding, childlike A - moody, theatrical, happy, unpredictable, conceited, likable, friendly

Female Character: Jane Foster

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: None. "Regular" human. She's an astrophysicist.

Role in escalation of plot: helps him get to Mjolnir first time; Thor falling in love with her parallels his character growth - "if he be worthy"

Role in resolution: little, except that Thor becomes kind & caring, maybe because of her.

Critical scene for character: rooftop scene; telling Selvig it's not just magic

Note any change they go through: none

Sexual subject/object codes: alluring behavior(?)

Interaction style codes: leader, independent, instrumental

Character traits (BEM): M - self-reliant, defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, analytical, ambitious A - helpful, unpredictable, sincere, friendly, adaptable

MOVIE - Fantastic Four (2005)

Number of Female Characters: 3

Number of Male Characters: 5

Male Character: Reed Richards/Mr. Fantastic

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: Body turns elastic & stretches

Role in escalation of plot: it's his idea to go in space and study solar flare
he tries to build a machine to get them back to normal

Role in resolution: he's in charge @ fight - tells others what to do - leads to their win

Critical scene for character: Sue tells him "you never get it"

Note any change character goes through: he decides "no more variables" and to be with Sue and let it be "simple"

Sexual subject/object codes: provocative attire?, sexual gazer

Interaction style codes: Leader, Independent, Instrumental

Character traits (BEM): [list them] ^M independent, assertive, analytical, leader, ambitious

F-loyal, ^{A - jealous} ~~compassionate~~

Female Character: Sue Storm/Invisible Girl - I think that's her official name
↳ Johnny refers to her as Invisible Girl

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: turns invisible, also has a force field

Role in escalation of plot: she works for/is in a relationship with Victor Doom & comes along on the mission - her role is unclear/nonexistent - Doom is jealous of Reed being with her

Role in resolution: helps contain heat to stop Doom, w force field

Critical scene for character: Tells Reed "you'll never get it"

Note any change they go through: no clear change - maybe controlling her power - they all do this

Sexual subject/object codes: object of gaze, alluring behavior, beauty concerns, provocative attire

Interaction style codes: Follower, Passive, Emotional

Character traits (BEM): M -

F - feminine, sympathetic, sensitive to others' needs, compassionate, eager to soothe hurt

A Johnny Storm's power often results in loss of clothing - jokes aren't sexual; Invisible Girl has to remove clothing to be in costume - jokes are all sexual!

MOVIE - Elektra (2005)

Number of Female Characters: 3

Number of Male Characters: 10

Male Character: Kirigi

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: no? he's got martial arts training and can move very quickly

Role in escalation of plot:

He's searching for "the treasure"

Role in resolution:

He fights Elektra for Abby (the treasure)

Critical scene for character:

When his dad puts him in charge of finding the treasure

Note any change they go through:

none

Sexual subject/object codes:

none

Interaction style codes:

Leader, respected, aggressive,
Character traits (BEM): [list them]
M- forceful, leader, masculine, aggressive, ambitious
F- ability acts as
A- theatrical, unpredictable,

Female Character: Elektra

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none? her skill in martial arts + "The way" lets her see the future & present

Role in escalation of plot:

She's hired as an assassin to kill Abby + her dad

Role in resolution:

She fights bad guy for Abby's safety & beats everyone

Critical scene for character:

Abby's death

Sensei's speech about her heart being pure
Note any change they go through: Elektra becomes more emotional & nurturing - bonds with Abby; learns "The way"; She learns "her heart is pure"

Sexual subject/object codes:

object of gaze, provocative attire

Interaction style codes:

Independent, Aggressive, Instrumental → becomes emotional

Character traits (BEM):

M- independent, assertive, forceful, analytical, self-reliant, self-sufficient, aggressive,
F- becomes compassionate,

MOVIE - Iron Man (2008)

Number of Female Characters: 2

Number of Male Characters: 7

Male Character: Tony Stark / Iron Man

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none, just money + technology - suit of metal, flight, weapons,

Role in escalation of plot: gets kidnapped, his weapons company started all the plot, he decides to build Iron Man suits

Role in resolution:

Stops Obidiah (w suit) + saves Pepper

Critical scene for character:

Scene where Pepper quits

Note any change they go through:

decides to become more responsible - becomes Iron Man & becomes responsible for his company's actions

Sexual subject/object codes:

Come-on, sexual gazer,

Interaction style codes:

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - self-reliant, defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, strong personality, analytical, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, self-sufficient, dominant, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, individualistic, F - flatterable, A - moody, theatrical, unpredictable, conceited,

Female Character: Pepper Potts

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none

Role in escalation of plot:

only that she keeps the first arc reactor to commemorate it

Role in resolution:

she gets info abt O. betraying T. (which lets O know they know) ? Tony has to rescue her at end

Critical scene for character:

Scene where Pepper quits

Note any change they go through:

none

Sexual subject/object codes:

provocative attire

Interaction style codes:

follower, deferential, passive, emotional

Character traits (BEM): M -

F - yielding, feminine,

loyal, compassionate

A - helpful, reliable, tactful

MOVIE - Iron Man 2

Number of Female Characters: 3

Number of Male Characters: 10

Male Character: Iron Man/Tony Stark

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none, just money + technology - suits of metal, flight, weapons

Role in escalation of plot:

His suits prompted others to try to build; he refuses to share OR think there's a threat (wrong)

Role in resolution:

Stops Ivan Vanko + rogue drones + suit, saves Pepper

Critical scene for character:

Party scene, plane scene with Pepper?, rooftop scene with Pepper?

Note any change they go through:

Recklessness (as result of dying) → less recklessness? bc of relationship with Pepper?

Sexual subject/object codes:

Sexual gazer, come-on,

Interaction style codes:

Respected, Independent, Aggressive, Instrumental

Character traits (BEM): [list them]

M - defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, strong personality, forceful, analytical, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, dominant, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, individualistic, competitive, F - flatterable A - moody, theatrical, unpredictable, secretive, conceited, likable,

Female Character: Pepper Potts

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none

Role in escalation of plot: Tony asks her to take over his company as CEO

Role in resolution: She and Tony kiss - romantic resolution; she calls police and sends Hammer to jail

Critical scene for character:

Tony promotes her to CEO

Pepper tries to resign at end of film

Note any change they go through:

Running Tony's company is stressed and angry about it to... + now dating Tony
less angry

Sexual subject/object codes:

none

Interaction style codes:

Leader, Respected, Passive Emotional Independent

Character traits (BEM): M - independent, assertive,

F - feminine, compassionate,

A - helpful, reliable, tactful, adaptable,

only 1200 peppers Extremis; and the smaller have out of no real - 10 more in armor "was a cocoon" - he's a changed man, but you can't take away the fact that he is Iron Man

MOVIE - Iron Man 3

Number of Female Characters: 4,

Number of Male Characters: 7

Male Character: Iron Man/Tony Stark

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none, just money + technology - suits of metal, flight, weapons

Role in escalation of plot:

Shunned Killian, threatens the Mandarin

Role in resolution:

Fights Killian to save Pepper (and President)

Critical scene for character:

Tony confessing to Pepper that he's a wreck

Tony destroying his suits

Note any change they go through:

deciding to give up suits + arc reactor - "distractions"

Sexual subject/object codes:

Sexual gazer,

Interaction style codes:

Follower (with Rhodes), Respected, Independent, Aggressive, Instrumental + Emotional

Character traits (BEM): [list them]

M - self-reliant, defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, strong personality, analytical, willing to take risks, makes decisions easily, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive,

F - flatterable, loyal, affectionate

Female Character:

Pepper Potts

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none - at the end of the movie she gets Extremis -

Role in escalation of plot:

kidnapped by Killian as leverage against Tony

Role in resolution:

Kills Killian & convinces Tony to give up his suits

Critical scene for character:

Killing Killian

Note any change they go through:

* she understands why T doesn't want to give up the suits
Extremis turns her more violent - but Tony fixes it later, off-screen

Sexual subject/object codes:

Come-on, object of gaze, provocative attire

Interaction style codes:

Aggressive after Extremis, typically Passive; Emotional

Character traits (BEM): M -

F - affectionate, loyal, feminine, sympathetic, compassionate

MOVIE - Superman Returns

Number of Female Characters: 4

Number of Male Characters: 6

Male Character: Clark Kent / Superman

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: alien - super strength, flight, ^{-laser vision} enhanced hearing, ^{except lead} X-ray vision, ^{bulletproof} Super speed,
weakness - kryptonite - he gets his power from sunlight

Role in escalation of plot: he comes back, saves plane; his shrine thing is found by Lex Luthor which causes everything else

Role in resolution:

he almost dies, then goes back to stop Luthor's plan - almost sacrificing himself

Critical scene for character: flight with Lois

Fight near end with Lex Luthor

Note any change character goes through:

Accepting that Lois has moved on, learning he's a father? (none really)

Sexual subject/object codes: provocative attire?

Interaction style codes: Leader, Respected, Independent,

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - Self-reliant, independent, assertive, forceful, leader, willing to take risks, ~~self-sufficient~~, ~~self-sufficient~~, ~~self-sufficient~~, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, F - loyal, sensitive to others' needs; A - helpful, jealous, secretive, solemn

Female Character: Lois Lane

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none

Role in escalation of plot: "Superman" returns to save her from plane crash, Love interest, Damsel in distress

Role in resolution: she saves Superman from kryptonite; still a damsel

Critical scene for character: Plane scene? Rooftop conversation / flight
Scene with Lex Luthor + boat

Note any change they go through: hating Superman → loving him (again)

Sexual subject/object codes: none

Interaction style codes: Respected, Independent, Instrumental

Character traits (BEM): M - self-reliant, defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, analytical, willing to take risks, ~~leader~~, ambitious, acts as leader, leadership ability

MOVIE - Green Lantern (2011)

Number of Female Characters: 4

Number of Male Characters: 12

Male Character: Green Lantern/Hal Jordan

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: ring gives him the power to create things from energy, fly

Role in escalation of plot: he gets chosen by the ring

Role in resolution: he kills the villain all on his own, via a sacrifice
move - but he doesn't die

Critical scene for character: training?

deciding to fight & telling Guardians

Note any change they go through: thinking he's not worthy of ring → believing he is

trying to reject fear → overcoming it
Sexual subject/object codes: object of gaze, come-on, self gaze

Interaction style codes: Independent, Aggressive,

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - self-reliant, independently defends own beliefs, assertive, willing to take risks, masculine, takes a stand, aggressive, competitive
F - flatterable A - theatrical,

Female Character: Carol

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none

Role in escalation of plot: none

Role in resolution: she encourages Hal not to quit, to fight & be brave
damsel in distress → but she helps him (minor role, though)

Critical scene for character: flight scene at the beginning
rooftop conversation

Note any change they go through: none

Sexual subject/object codes: alluring behavior, object of gaze

Interaction style codes: Follower, Deferential, Emotional

Character traits (BEM): M - defends own beliefs, assertive, ambitious
F - loyal, compassionate, understanding, affectionate

MOVIE - Batman Begins

Number of Female Characters: |

Number of Male Characters: | 2

Male Character: Batman/Bruce Wayne

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none - trained in martial arts/as a fighter, has a lot of technology
- vigilante (he can glide, hear well, etc)

Role in escalation of plot: decides to become Batman to fight corruption/evil

Role in resolution: he saves everyone! The whole city, and then continues to help - at the end there's the Bat Signal

Critical scene for character: Rachel's snap back to earth

Confronting guilt/learning with Raz Al Ghul
"It's not who you are underneath, but what you do that defines you."
Note any change character goes through: Revenge focus → justice focus; Anger/guilt → using his fear; changes focus to Greater Good

Sexual subject/object codes:

Sexual gazer (ladies at restaurant)

Interaction style codes: Leader, Respected, Independent, Aggressive,

Instrumental - but becomes less selfish/self-serving

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - independent, defends own beliefs, athletic, assertive, forceful, leader, takes risks, makes decisions easily, masculine, takes a stand, aggressive, F - compassionate A - moody, conscientious, theatrical, secretive, adaptable

Female Character: Rachel Dawes

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none

- lawyer/attorney?

Role in escalation of plot: She opens his eyes to corruption, justice outside of himself in his problems,

Role in resolution:

delivers antidote to Gordon (w/o which they can't save city), saves small boy, is rescued

Critical scene for character: telling Bruce to look around + snapping him

Note any change they go through: None? maybe a change in understanding of Bruce

Sexual subject/object codes:

none

Interaction style codes: Independent

Character traits (BEM): M - ~~independent~~ defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, analytical, takes risks, takes a stand, F - loyal, sympathetic, compassionate, A - conscientious, reliable, truthful,

MOVIE - The Dark Knight

Number of Female Characters: 4

Number of Male Characters: 10

Male Character: Batman/Bruce Wayne

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none - martial arts/fighting training, + a lot of technology (SS)
- vigilante
↳ he can glide, hear well, etc

Role in escalation of plot: he's messed up the mob's lifestyle → leads to Joker's introduction

Role in resolution: he catches the Joker, stops Dent, saves everyone, takes the fall for Harvey's crimes

Critical scene for character:

upside down Joker scene

very end - "hero Gotham deserves"

Note any change they go through:

none? he does kill Dent; takes the fall as Batman - sacrificing "symbol"?

Sexual subject/object codes: none

Interaction style codes: Independent, Aggressive, Respected

Character traits (BEM): [list them] M - defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, forceful, analytical, willing to take risks, dominant, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, athletic
F - compassionate (less than last movie)
A - moody, theatrical, unpredictable, secretive

Female Character: Rachel Dawes

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none

Role in escalation of plot: none

Role in resolution:

her death contributes to Harvey's path to villainy, and Bruce's sadness → movement into action (?)

Critical scene for character: Her letter to Bruce

Death scene?

Note any change they go through: well, she dies.

Sexual subject/object codes:

provocative attire

Interaction style codes: Dependent, Passive, Emotional

Character traits (BEM): M - defends own beliefs,

F - feminine, compassionate,

unstoppable force meets an immovable object... the whole is unmovable. like you could fall. "He's the hero Gotham deserves, but not the one it is right now."

MOVIE - The Dark Knight Rises (2013)

Number of Female Characters: 2

Number of Male Characters: 10

Male Character: Batman/Bruce Wayne

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none - fighting skills + a lot of technology and money
↳ can glide, hear well, etc

Role in escalation of plot:

Came back as Batman / also had fingerprints/money stolen

Role in resolution:

Stops Bane/Talia, sacrifices himself to stop bomb

Critical scene for character:

talking to blind doctor in pit about fear/death
Sacrifice at end

Note any change they go through:

Moved back into action, then moved back to "no longer needing the Batman"

Sexual subject/object codes:

provocative, attire

Interaction style codes:

Respected, Independent, Aggressive,

Character traits (BEM): [list them]

M - defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, forceful, willing to take risks, masculine, willing to take a stand, aggressive, athletic
F - loyal, compassionate, A - theatrical, Moody, Solemn,

Female Character: Selina Kyle/Catwoman

Type of char: Supporting

Superpower: none, just tech + fighting skills

Role in escalation of plot: she steals his fingerprints for Bane; Betrays him to Bane

Role in resolution: she "turns good" and saves Batman from Bane + helps him stop the bomb

Critical scene for character:

opening scene is important
when she betrays Bruce

Note any change they go through:

she comes back to save Bruce

only looking out for herself → looking out for others/becoming Good
Sexual subject/object codes: come-on, object of gaze, alluring behavior,

provocative attire

Interaction style codes:

Independent, Aggressive, Instrumental (becomes more emotional)

Character traits (BEM):

M - self-reliant, defends own beliefs, independent, assertive, forceful, analytical, self-sufficient, aggressive, individualistic
F - unpredictable, secretive, undependable

MOVIE - *Nathaniel (2011)*

Number of Female Characters: 4

Number of Male Characters: 11

Male Character: Dr. Manhattan

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: he's like a god - super intelligence, super strength, telekinesis, teleportation, controls matter - can create & destroy it

Role in escalation of plot:

helped Adrian harness his power, then just left earth bc he didn't care

Role in resolution:

returns to fight Adrian & stop him - then decides he's right, and to leave the galaxy

Critical scene for character:

telling Laurie he was wrong about miracles

Note any change they go through: lack of appreciation for life/humanity/emotions → appreciation of them, valuing them (still leaving though)

Sexual subject/object codes:

provocative attire

Interaction style codes:

respected, independent, instrumental

Character traits (BEM): [list them]

casual, self-sufficient, masculine,

F -

A - solemn

Female Character: Laurie / 2nd Silk Spectre

Type of char: Principal

Superpower: none? she has martial arts/fighting skills

Role in escalation of plot:

she causes Dr. Manhattan to leave by leaving him

Role in resolution:

she causes him to come back when he appreciates how her existence

Critical scene for character:

"John saw a lot of things but he never saw me" - a miracle

or conversation w M on Mars

Note any change they go through:

getting over M and being with Dan? / Accepting her mom's choices - her father

Sexual subject/object codes:

provocative attire,

Interaction style codes:

follower, dependent, emotional

Character traits (BEM): M - defends own beliefs,

F - affectionate, loyal, feminine, compassionate

A -